

ARCHIBALD BERNARD PENCE

Archie came from a military family. He was the only child of Major Adolphus Bernerd Pence and Sylvia Archibald. Archie always said his father's one biggest disappointment was that his son inlisted in the US Navy instead of the US Army.

He attended basic training at the Naval Training Center in San Diego, California. The USS Oklahoma was his first ship assignment. He was a Seaman Second Class when just twelve days after his twentieth birthday, the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor. He related the following information to me. He got up that Sunday morning on December 7, 1941 and went to the restroom. At that time a Japanese ^{torpedo} ~~bomb~~ destroyed his sleeping compartment. It was only by chance and exceptionally good luck that he was not in his bunk at that time or this biography would end here. He went topside and heard someone say to pass the word to abandon ship. He told me he didn't have to be told twice. He immediately jumped overboard. The USS Maryland was alongside the USS Oklahoma and he was picked up by the Maryland's crew.

After getting ashore he and another sailor grabbed an ~~unused~~ launch and started after survivors. There was so much burning debris, smoke and flaming oil among people in the bay that rescuing them became the highest priority. Many were injured and needed immediate help. While the Japanese attack lasted only a couple of hours, the devastation left behind ^{had} Archie and the other young sailor working hectically for hours getting people ashore. I remember telling me that at one time he was so covered with oil that he had to go ashore to clean up. I'm not sure when that occurred, but probably after after a hectic time pulling people out of oil in the bay. Fortunately, he was a strong swimmer so he was most likely in and out of the water many times. It was about two weeks before his parents got word that he was safe.

He related little to me about his time on the Henry T. Allen or the Barnegat except to say he was stranded in North Africa.

He was a coxswain then and had been sent up a river on an assignment in a small boat. The ship was ordered to leave immediately so it sailed without him. That was one of two times he said that he lost a full seabag or clothing.

It was in May 1943 that he was assigned to the USS Cowpens, a small aircraft carrier. He had just made Boatswain Mate First Class shortly before I met him on April 6, 1945. The 4th time I saw him, on our 4th date, he asked me to marry him. We were married a year later on April 20, 1946 at his parents home in San Pedro, California. A year later when our first child, Susan was born, he was in the Hawaiian Islands and serving aboard the USS Antietam. He then received his first shore duty at the Sand Point Naval Air Station in Seattle, Washington in August 1947. Our second child, Robert, was born there. Archie joined the Valley Forge in San Diego, California in late April of 1950. He sailed just one week before Richard, our third child was born.

In 1950 after making Chief Petty Officer, he had been at sea for four months when the Korean was broke out. The Valley Forge was the only aircraft carrier that the United States had in that part of the world at that time. The ship returned to San Diego for just four days to load aircraft and then returned to Korean waters for seven more months. He later served as Flight Deck Chief on the USS Antietam.

A navy doctor found that Archie had cancer. After major surgery at Balboa Naval Hospital in San Diego, he was on medical leave when we decided it was time to put down some permanent roots. Archie, with the help of family, hired carpenters and friends built a ~~duplex~~ in San Diego. You will note, I said Archie, but the truth is he was so weak following his surgery he could hardly lift a hammer. However he supervised the whole process and did what he was able to do as he gained back his strength. His many Navy friends flocked to our apartment to help build when news of my mother's great fried chicken and home made rolls reached his new ship, the USS Kearsarge. We ended up with a 4-plex and rented the other three apartments.

We had a two year of duty in-Japan from 1957 to 1959. Archie was an exceptional public speaker so the Navy sent him throughout the Far East lecturing to Navy men concerning their Navy careers and benefits of Naval service.

He transferred to the Naval Reserve in 1960 after 20 years of service. In his career he earned fourteen medals including one each from the Philippine and Korean governments.

Awhile after leaving the Navy he returned to college and graduated with a BS in Accounting from San Diego State College. He worked for a state agency as an auditor before retiring in 1985.

Archie had I had about ten or so years of marvelous fun and travel. He did so enjoy golf, bowling and volunteer work at the Friend's of the Library's Bookstore. Archie had been an avid book reader at one time. However he began to get Parkinson's Disease in the mid 1990's and it began to take it's tole on his sports activities that he loved. As the disease progressed to a severe state he gradually stopped eating and silently passed away on April 29, 2004. He had a wonderful sense of humor and was always pleasant to be around. Perhaps that is why he made friends so easily. He was 82 years old at the time of his passing and we had been married for 58 years. In the years that I knew Archie, he was kind, gentle and generous to me and his children. I know I will see Archie again, because surely God in His infinite wisdom, will not deny me in the hereafter, what was such a joy to me on this earth.

Helen Pence, wife